



Cat-to-Cat Introductions **(and Getting Your Cat Used to Your Home)**

General Guidelines and Information

Positive Socialization

- Try to introduce the new cat to family members one or two people at a time, rather than having a pack of people surround him.
- Let the cat approach you; don't rush up to him. Sit or kneel down, hold your hand out, let the cat sniff your finger, and then gently scratch him under the chin, on top of his head, on the cheeks or behind the ears. Let the cat take his time getting to know you. Young children should have adult supervision.
- After the cat becomes comfortable with family members, create positive experiences with different people (men, women, children)
- Cats should be gradually exposed to things in your household (i.e., vacuum cleaners, TV, stairs, different surfaces (carpet, tile), etc. If a cat hasn't been around these things, or if you have a kitten, they can be overwhelmed.
- Make sure the cat enjoys all of his experiences with people and the environment by having food, toys and petting during these interactions.

Preventing "Mistakes"

- When first bringing the cat home, avoid petting the cat for long periods of time, as this may cause the cat to become overly stimulated, which triggers the "don't-pet-me-anymore" syndrome resulting in an aggression response (i.e., scratching, biting, hissing) to be left alone.
- Do not restrain the cat if he wants to walk away, and don't rush in to pick him up. Children should especially be prevented from doing this.
- Do not force a cat to experience something that he is afraid of.
- Remove the cat from any situation immediately if you see that the cat is frightened or overwhelmed.
- Make it a point to get the cat used to children. Start first with older children that can follow directions about what to do and not do.
- Avoid overwhelming the cat with too many things at once. Give him time to adjust to each new person and environmental experience, particularly if he appears to be timid or shy.

Punishment

Punishment should not be used for inappropriate behavior. If used more than occasionally, punishment can cause one or both animals to associate bad things with the presence of the other. This can create problems which can result in fearful and/or aggressive behavior.

All interactions should be supervised. Start out with short periods of time, then progress to longer time periods (with you always present!). Do not allow the animals to be alone together until you see friendly behavior toward one another (consistently) for at least a week.

A Note About Cats

There are varying degrees regarding how well cats will tolerate living with other felines. Some cats are very friendly and can tolerate several animal friends; others are forever meant to be the sole cat in the household. Some cats will be fine with certain cats, but not ALL other cats. The problem for cat owners is that it is very difficult, if not impossible to predict what kind of relationship any two cats will develop with each other.

Setting Expectations

First impressions are crucial to cats. The first introduction sets the tone of the relationship for a long time, if not permanently. A slow and proper introduction can make a big difference on how things go in the future. However, this doesn't mean that things will work out even if you do everything right!

The Introduction

General Time Frames (stay on the level past the recommended timeline if see even the slightest sign of concern – would go over signs/behaviors to look for that indicate stress/anxiety/aggression -- body language, vocalizations, etc.). Move back to the previous “level” making sure to keep using the extremely yummy treats (i.e., salmon, chicken, tuna) and do a few more times at previous level before trying to move to the next level again.

Preventing “mistakes” – Do not move the introduction along too quickly – rushing the process is the most common mistake people make during the introductory process.

Days 1-3 (complete separation)

First and foremost is prevention and not allowing for negative interactions.

Cats to be confined in separate areas with all necessities (litter box, food, water, toys, bed, scratching post, etc.)

Play music (Mood Music for Cats: A Ball of Twine for kitties) – do this a few hours each day

Animals unable to get to one another, including through the cracks under the doors.

Visual blocks (doors closed)

Scent blocks (as much as possible) – place towel at bottom of the door so they cannot see or smell one another

Use Feliway (spray in room 2X/Day) or plug-in – in the kitten's room
Play time with cats (2-3X/day for 15-20 minutes each time).
Nutrition – what is each animal being fed (want quality nutrition, along with food with moisture in it – canned, raw, refrigerated, vegetables, meats, etc.)

Days 4-7 (start slow introductory process)

Continue above for exercise/play and Feliway
Play music for everyone to hear for a few hours a day
Swap scents (bedding, t-shirts they've laid on, etc.) between the animals
Allow the cats to explore other areas of the home while being supervised (with dog confined outside or other room without any visual access to one another). This will allow the kitten to get to know the house, as well as pick up the scent of the dog throughout the home. (2-3 X/Day for 5-10 minutes each time)

Days 8-10 (continued introductory process)

Continue above for exercise/play and Feliway
Play music for everyone to hear for a few hours a day
Continue to allow kitten to explore (supervised) the home, and put other cat in the kitten's room when kitten is exploring remainder of house
Move gate away and keep door closed so that they can smell one another through the door, and look under the door at one another. Continue as long as they do not display any fearful, aggressive, or anxious behavior toward one another. Ideally, we want to see friendly (at least tolerant) behavior.

- Use toys, treats (tuna, chicken or salmon!), calm/relaxing petting as long as the animals aren't being threatening or anxious toward one another.

Days 11-14

Start allowing them to see one another through baby gates. May want to have two baby gates at a distance from one another (one in doorway and one a little further down the hall placed 8-12 feet from other gate)

- Give yummy treats, toys, play, happy talk, pets – anything they each love – in the presence of one another
 - o Do this for several minutes 2-3 times/day

Days 15-20

If all has gone well through baby gates, it is time to do same-room introductions.

Try the following (1-2 times the first day – only for a few minutes each time!). Keep a sufficient distance between the two animals to help reduce any fear, aggression, anxiety or over-excitement. Throughout the introduction, give yummy treats, toys, play, happy talk, pets – anything they each love – in the presence of one another

If the cats are used to being crated, put one animal in the crate while the other roams around in the same room.

- Cover the crate initially so that only one side is exposed.

- Move close enough to crate so that they are aware of one another, but nobody is reacting to one another. Give rewards to the cat not in the crate.
- Give kitten rewards through the crate as well.
- You can then have them change places, and put the other cat into the crate and let the other roam free. Cover one side can also be helpful during the introduction.
 - Encourage the cat to approach the kitten's crate as long as the cat is being calm
 - Continue giving the kitten treats/petting/happy talk so that he is not fearful

20+ Days

Keep working at this level (with one of them confined/leashed) until both animals can be calm when close to each other. Allow each to sniff the other. It is best NOT to hold any of the cats during the introduction, as becoming frightened can lead scratching and/or biting.

If you have any questions or concerns during this introductory process, please contact the Sacramento SPCA Behavior and Training Department – behavior@sspca.org or 916-504-2848.